

NEPAL PAST AND PRESENT

Proceedings of the France-German
Conference Arc-et-Senans, June 1990

Edited by
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Sterling Publishers Private Limited

New Delhi

1993

The Textual History of the Different Versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa»

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The title «Svayambhūpurāṇa» is generally used to designate a peculiar work of the traditional Newar Buddhism, though the work has not at all been handed down as an uniform text, but rather in various and partly quite different versions. The characterization as a «Purāṇa», however, which was obviously taken over from the Hindu model of the corresponding literary genre, was bestowed on the Buddhist work relatively late in the course of its text historical development. Concerning the contents of the work Sylvain Lévi has already pointed to the fact that the subject-matter would rather suggest the designation «Māhātmya»¹, since, being a sort of pilgrims' handbook, the work is dedicated to a large extent to the glorification and cult of important Buddhist shrines in the Kathmandu Valley, above all, as the title says, the Svayambhūcaitya. On the one hand the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» is deeply rooted in local conditions, as it has taken up popular elements of the specific world-view and religious practices of the Newar Buddhists and reflects them in their regional contexts; and as such the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» is to my knowledge the most voluminous literary document of the «little tradition» of medieval Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley. On the other hand this work is, of course, based also on supra-regional Buddhist traditions as for example the teachings of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna or the legends of older Buddhist Jātaka and Avadāna literature². Handwritten: 1. and 2. etc.

The extraordinarily great number of traditional manuscripts of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» testifies that this native work had reached remarkable diffusion and achieved high esteem in *Nepāla Maṇḍala*. Thus, for example, the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (in the following: NGMPP) has filmed already more than one hundred complete or incomplete manuscripts of the work and doubtless even more are extant in the Kathmandu Valley; and also Indian and European manuscript collections are known to contain a good many further manuscripts of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa». Handwritten: 3. etc.

Furthermore, the variety of the more or less divergent Svayambhūpurāṇa versions already noted, most of them written in Sanskrit, but partly also in Newari, points to a vigorous tradition of reception and redaction of this work in Nepal – and at the same time to historical changes in the intentions as well as in the religious orientation of the Buddhist redactors who again and again revised and enlarged the work or even reshaped the whole text.

Despite the diffusion and significance of the Svayambhūpurāṇa in the history of Newar Buddhism modern research on Nepal or on Buddhism in general up to now has not undertaken a detailed and comprehensive philological and text historical examination or presentation of the various versions, not to mention a systematic historical evaluation of the cultural and religious contents of the work.

One reason for this may be seen in the only extant text edition of one of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» versions prepared by Haraprasad Sastri in 1894-1900³. The Sanskrit language as well as the coherence of the contents of this version are not however really satisfactory. Thus Bernhard Kölver qualified the Sanskrit text of this edition as «full of insufficiencies and elementary mistakes», and about its contents he added: «The thread of the tale is constantly in danger of getting lost»⁴; and Sylvain Lévi even blamed the learned editor himself: «Il n'est pas conforme au "fair play" même entre brahmane et bouddhiste, de choisir, comme de parti pris, les leçons les plus incorrectes et d'éliminer les autres»⁵. In fact, it is true that there are much better versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» than the one edited.

Further difficulties in the investigation of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» result from the fact that the work belongs to a special type of literature which is technically known as «anonymous literature»⁶, that is to say, as literature which has grown over the course of long periods of time. Works of this type can be dated only with great difficulty, and are frequently anything but texts which can be considered consistent in themselves. Consequently they require a specific methodological approach. As to the «Svayambhūpurāṇa», it would seem to be indicated to take into account its diachronical dimensions, i.e. to regard its various traditional versions as different developmental stages of a process of text historical growth and change. Once the chronological order of these versions is ascertained, the modifications of contents will become clear in their details, and together with them the motives and intentions too of individual authors and redactors.

Different text versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» were successively detected and roughly described by individual Indologists during the 19th century. Up to now the best survey of those versions was contributed by Sylvain Lévi in the year 1905⁷. Nevertheless my own collations, particularly of the numerous manuscripts from Nepal filmed by the NGMPP, have led to results of a partly different kind. In the following I restrict myself to the presentation of my own findings, and I may state in my favour that, owing to the preparatory work of the NGMPP, I have had access to many more manuscripts than my predecessors in the field.

The «Svayambhūpurāṇa» has been handed down partly in Sanskrit and partly in Newari versions. Among the Sanskrit texts, there are recensions with eight, ten and twelve chapters (called Paricchēdas or Adhyāyas), whereas the Newari manuscripts uniformly show a version with ten chapters. Concerning the extent of the text, there are enormous differences among the ascertained versions. By far the shortest version has only 280 verses, the longest more than 4600. The synopsis in Table 1 gives a rough idea of the different recensions and versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» as well as of their extent and titles as given in the manuscripts themselves.

The following short comments on the different recensions and versions refer directly to the list in Table 1:

— The shortest recension with eight Paricchēdas has two versions, namely an almost purely prose text (version I.A) on the one hand and a purely metrical composition (I.B) on the other; still the contents of both these versions are remarkably similar⁸.

— The longest recension with eight Adhyāyas comprises two versions, i.e. a shorter one (II.A) and an extended one (II.B) with about 500 additional verses⁹. The recension II literally includes almost the entire text of version I.B.

— The recension with ten Adhyāyas has a Sanskrit (III.A) and a Newari version (III.B)¹⁰. On the whole the contents of both texts are similar, though in the fifth Adhyāya, where the main holy places (Tīrthas) of the Kathmandu Valley are described, there are considerable differences of quantity.

— Finally, the recension with twelve Adhyāyas (IV) is relatively homogeneous in the manuscripts I have compared¹¹. The proportion of prose and metrical parts is rather different in the single chapters; there are Adhyāyas purely composed in verses, whereas others are predominantly written in prose.

All the manuscripts I have seen, which for reasons of content belong to the «Svayambhūpurāṇa», can be subsumed under the one or the other of these recensions or versions; and to belong to the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» primarily means to present a particular set and sequence of legends or themes. This set mainly consists of the following items:

— Once the Buddha Śākyasīmha visited Nepāla Maṇḍala and narrated the following events of the legendary history of and around the Svayambhūcaitya:

— In the age of Śikhin the Nepal Valley was a lake in which Svayambhū spontaneously sprang up in the shape of a wonderful lotus;

— practices and results of the worship of Svayambhū are related in great detail;

— in the age of Viśvabhū Mañjuśrī drained the Nepal Valley;

— in the age of Krakucchanda the Valley was populated;

— the holy places (Tīrthas and Upatīrthas) in the Valley are described;

— in the age of Kanaka the learned monk Dharmasrīmitra was instructed by Mañjuśrī about a section of the Nāmasaṃgīti;

Table 1
Recensions and versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*

Recension I (eight Paricchadas)* :	
— Version I.A	Sanskrit version in prose MSS. : NGMPP D 12/7 ; E 1134/2 ; E 1372/19, etc. extent : 410 Ślokas** title : Goṣṛṅgaparvatasvayambhūcaityabhaṭṭāarakoddeśa
— Version I.B	Sanskrit version in verses*** MSS. : NGMPP A 125/16 ; A 127/6 ; B 101/16, etc. extent : 280 verses title : Svayambhūcaityabhaṭṭāarakoddeśa
Recension II (eight Adhyāyas)* :	
— Version II.A	Sanskrit version in verses MSS. : NGMPP A 124/16 ; C 15/2 ; D 34/39 extent : c. 4 100 verses title : Goṣṛṅgaparvatasvayambhūcaityabhaṭṭāarakoddeśa
— Version II.B	Sanskrit version in verses MSS. : NGMPP C 15/3 ; E 1/1 extent : c. 4 600 verses title : Goṣṛṅgaparvatasvayambhūcaityabhaṭṭāarakoddeśa or Bṛhatsvayambhūpurāṇa
Recension III (ten Adhyāyas) :	
— Version III.A	Sanskrit version in verses MSS. : A 923/3 ; B 101/4 ; D 36/2, etc. extent : c. 1 750 verses title : Svayambhūcaityabhaṭṭāarakoddeśa or Svayambhūcaitya- samutpattikathā
— Version III.B	Newari version in prose MSS. : B 102/3 ; C 54/3 ; H 91/15, etc. title : Svayambhūtpattikathā or Svāyambhuva Mahāpurāṇa
Recension IV (twelve Adhyāyas) :	
	Sanskrit recension partly in verses, partly in prose MSS. : B 101/2 ; B 102/4 ; E 696/2 etc. extent : c. 3 600 Ślokas title : Svāyambhuva Mahāpurāṇa

* Paricchada and Adhyāya are terms for «chapter».

** Śloka is used here as a term for a text unit of 32 syllables.

*** Verse means a stanza of two lines.

— in the age of Kāśyapa the Vajracārya Śāntaśrī covered the Svayambhūcaitya with a Stūpa in order to protect it;

— in the present age, under the king Guṇakāmadeva, the Vajracārya Śāntideva/Śāntikara (partly also identified with Śāntaśrī !) overcame drought by means of a Nāgasādhana ceremony.

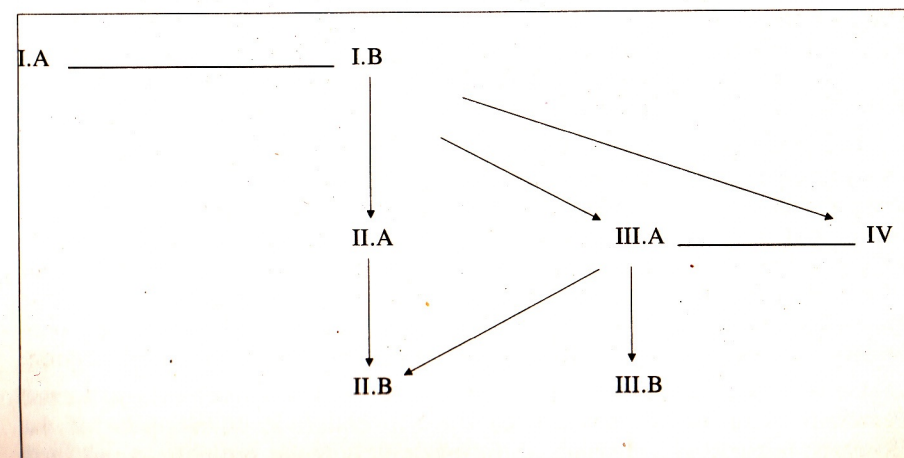
This set of themes constitutes the kernel and, at the same time, occupies the major part of all the different versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa»; it is already completely present in the shortest extant version, and even in the longest versions it is supplemented only with very few and obviously secondary or even marginal additional items.

The order of the list of recensions and versions given in Table 1 is a typological, not a historical one; and, of course, the question arises: What was the historical sequence of these texts? Is it possible to find out, if not their absolute chronology, then at least their relative chronological order? The preliminary results of my investigations on the textual history of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» show that the relation of a part of the extant recensions and versions to each other is clearly recognizable and determinable. The schematic representation in Table 2 is supposed to demonstrate at a glance to what extent I think the text historical development to be clear (indicated by unbroken arrows) and at the same time in which cases the relations between the texts are not yet certain (broken arrows or unbroken horizontal lines) and need further comparative examination.

The following remarks are directly pertinent to the diagram in Table 2 :

— As already indicated, the two versions I.A and I.B are different as to wording and yet very near to each other as far as their contents are concerned. Nevertheless the direction of dependence between the two is not yet clear to me. One would perhaps expect the verse version to be secondary and, in fact, there are indications which point in this direction, but on the other hand there are elements which I.A already shares with II.A and which are not yet to be found in I.B. That is why I have placed I.A and I.B side by side without marking any developmental direction.

Table 2
Text historical development of the recensions
and versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa»



— The shortest verse version (I.B) and the two longest verse versions (II.A and II.B), all of them consisting of eight chapters, have turned out to be in reality just different developmental stages of one and the same text, I.B representing the oldest extant shape of it and II.B the youngest developmental stage¹².

— An instructive insight into how textual enlargements were undertaken can be gained from the development from II.A to II.B. About half of the 500 verses, which were interpolated into II.B in the final developmental stage, was taken simply, *i.e.* without any change, from version III.A. This shows that version III.A, which is, as a whole, evidently a sort of amendment of earlier versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa», must be older at least than version II.B.

— Moreover version III.A probably does not depend on version II.A, but on one of the older versions of recension I, since in III.A there are no traces whatsoever of the main supplements occurring for the first time at the end of version II.A, namely the prophecies by Śākyamuni about the reign of King Yakṣamalla (historically well attested for A.D. 1428-82) and about the famous legend of Bandhudatta and Avalokiteśvara¹³. On the other hand, version III.A has as its most conspicuous innovation of contents an extensive double «link and frame» story¹⁴. Of this frame again there is no trace to be found in version II.A, whereas it was taken over, even word-for-word as was indicated above, by version II.B, and it is also present in recension IV.

— The relation between version III.A and recension IV is somehow comparable to that between I.A and I.B. The wording in both texts is again almost totally different, but the contents are parallel in such a way that a close connection between the two can't be denied though the direction of dependence is again not yet clear to me.

— The characterization or classification of the work as a «Purāṇa» is, as I mentioned before, a relatively late addition; it is exclusively to be found in the colophons of manuscripts belonging either to the Sanskrit version II.B or to the Newari prose version III.B, which is nothing more than a sort of Newari paraphrase of III.A, and to the recension IV. In the colophons of the recension IV the designation «Purāṇa» or even «Mahāpurāṇa» is not used as a sporadic second name as it is the case in II.B and III.B, but it is introduced throughout as the only valid title of the work.

The preliminary results of my observations on the textual history of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» may be thus resumed: The oldest stage of development is represented by a relatively small and unpretentious treatise on Buddhist themes and illustrative legends; and the Sanskrit designation «Uddeśa» exactly covered what it was at this stage. Over the course of probably longer periods of time, however, the treatise was enlarged and at the same time repeatedly reshaped so that it grew into an imposing Māhātmya or even Purāṇa – at the end about fifteen times as big as the oldest extant version.

Up to now I have confined myself merely to a few more or less formal arguments in favour of my view of the text historical development of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» materials. Unfortunately, it is not possible to put forth

here all the arguments pertinent to my view; but what should be done nonetheless is to say a word about the implications the foregoing text historical results have for the interpretation and evaluation of the contents of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa».

The «Svayambhūpurāṇa» mainly consists of a collection of Buddhist legends. These are arranged within the framework of the traditional Buddhist system of the ages of the world¹⁵ and, at least in the younger text versions, they were evidently intended as a sort of Vamśavalī or chronicle of the Nepalese Svayambhū sanctuary. But this doesn't hold true for the shortest and in my view oldest version of the work, where Nepal and Svayambhū seem not yet to have become the centre of interest. The point of departure of what was known later on as Svayambhūpurāṇa was most probably a compilation of episodes which were taken from different sources and which at least partly centred in the main round the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. The scenes of action in this oldest version were China, *i.e.* the homeland of Mañjuśrī, Vikramaśīla, a famous ancient monastery near Vārāṇasī, and finally also Nepal itself.

Further, the name «Gośṛṅga», which is regularly used for the Svayambhū hill in the oldest recension of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa», seems to have belonged originally to a hill which was the centre of religious life in the Khotan Valley. In 1948 John Brough stated: «The name of the sacred hill, Gośṛṅga, is regularly used in Khotan, whereas in Nepal the explanation that it was the name of the Svayambhū hill in a former age has every appearance of an afterthought»¹⁶. In fact, the verse in which it is declared that «Gośṛṅga» was the name of the Svayambhū hill in the Dvāpara age and «Gopuccha» (in Newari: Sāhyaṅgu) its name in the present Kali age¹⁷ does not agree with the name «Gośṛṅga», not «Gopuccha», being regularly used for that hill. The verse evidently was the first attempt to substitute the local Nepalese name «Gopuccha» for the name «Gośṛṅga», originally taken over from Khotan. Corresponding to this the authors or redactors of all the later versions of the Svayambhūpurāṇa made clear efforts to replace «Gośṛṅga» wherever it occurred by «Gopuccha», though this exchange of names was consistently accomplished throughout the whole text only in recension IV.

The process of a «Nepalization» of the Svayambhūpurāṇa can be followed up also in other parts or constituents of the different text versions, *e.g.* in the episode of the learned monk Dharmaśrīmitra who once travelled from his monastery Vikramaśīla (near Vārāṇasī) to the «Mañjuśrīparvata» or «Pañcaśikha» in China in order to be instructed by the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī on a section of the Nāmasaṃgīti. In the two oldest versions of recension I, there are mentioned only those two places, whereas in all the later versions the meeting of Dharmaśrīmitra and Mañjuśrī was explicitly transferred to Nepal.

This noticeable tendency of «Nepalization» in the textual history of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» is another strong argument in favour of the textual development as described above.

Finally, another clear change in the transmissional process mirrors a noteworthy development of religious practice in the medieval history of Newar

Buddhism. The older versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» still are characterized, at least to a distinctly larger extent than the earlier versions, by a sort of magic-bound and ritualistic orientation comparable, say, to Vajrayāna views and practices of late Northern Indian Buddhism. On the other hand, some of the subsequently added text portions of the later versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» show an increasing interest in a particular religious practice which was most probably taken over from Hinduism, namely pilgrimage piety, that is to say, visits to and circumambulations (in Sanskrit: *pradakṣiṇā*) of holy places. As far as Nepal is concerned this religious practice is well attested as the specific subject of the Māhātmya literature of Nepalese Hinduism¹⁸. Possibly this provenance was the reason why we find in the later versions of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» not only the interest in or inclination to these practices, but at the same time also passages where a sort of distrust or even refusal of such practices is expressed.

What is meant here can be illustrated with the help of the following story in the «Svayambhūpurāṇa». In all versions of this story there is described a heavy drought in the reign of the Nepalese king Guṇakāmadeva. In the two old versions I.A and I.B as well as in version II.A, there is only one means to salvation, one which depends on the magical skill of the Vajrācārya Śāntideva¹⁹ living next to the Svayambhūcaitya in Śāntipura. He knew how to perform a Nāgasādhana, i.e. a ritual ceremony with the effect of forcing the snakes, who are seen as being responsible for rain, to end the drought. The Vajrācārya performed the Sādhana successfully and there were again beneficial rains in Nepal.

In two of the later versions of the story, namely in III.A and in IV, there is an interpolation in which the Vajrācārya Śāntaśrī²⁰ first of all advises the king and his courtiers to make a pilgrimage; they follow the advice, nevertheless in both versions the Nāgasādhana is to be performed afterwards in order really to end the drought. There is, however, a difference in the explanation of the two versions. In the text of recension III.A, the pilgrimage alleviates the pain of the people of Nepal, but it is obviously seen as not strong enough to remove the obstacles to rain. So we have here an adoption, but at the same time also a clear subordination, of pilgrimage piety to the magical Vajrayāna ritualism. On the other hand, the text version of recension IV represents a harmonizing view. Here the text explicitly declares that the reason why the pilgrimage was not successful was only because it was done in an imperfect manner, that is, the pilgrims forgot on the way to worship the shrine of the snake king Karkoṭaka, so that the Nāgasādhana had to be performed afterwards in order to correct the negligence during the pilgrimage. The two methods are closely connected here with each other, in which fact one may see a redactional progress; but what is even more relevant in our present context is the conclusion that in this version both religious practices are basically accepted as equally effective and recommendable.

Notes

1. Sylvain Lévi, *Le Népal. Etude historique d'un royaume hindou*, vol. 1, Paris, 1905, p. 209f.
2. A first rough idea of the contents of the work as a whole can be drawn from Brian H. Hodgson, *Essays on the Languages, Literature, and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*, repr. New Delhi, 1972 (¹1874), p. 115-120; Rajendralala Mitra, *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, repr. Calcutta, 1971 (¹1882), p. 245-255; S. Lévi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 207-213, and vol. 3, Paris, 1908, p. 158-178.
3. *The Vṛihat Svayambhū Purāṇam*, Calcutta, 1894-1900 (Bibliotheca Indica).
4. Bernhard Kölver, «Stages in the Evolution of a World Picture», in: *Numen* 32, 1986, p. 135.
5. *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 212.
6. On the concept of anonymous literature as well as the problems associated with its study, see Paul Hacker; «Zur Methode der geschichtlichen Erforschung der anonymen Sanskritliteratur des Hinduismus», in *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 111, 1961, p. 483-492.
7. *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 208f.
8. I have prepared an edition of the two parallel versions on the basis of thirteen MSS. which is to be published soon.
9. Version II.B is the only text of the «Svayambhūpurāṇa» which has been published up to now in its entirety; see above note 3.
10. A facsimile edition of a manuscript (NGMPP: Reel No. A 923/3) of the Sanskrit version together with a transcription of the text has recently been prepared by Kamal P. Malla and will be published soon in Kathmandu.
11. Only two chapters of this recension have been edited up to the present, namely the tenth Adhyāya by Louis de La Vallée Poussin (*Svayambhūpurāṇa. Dixième chapitre*, Gand, 1893) and the fourth Adhyāya by Ratna Handurukande (*Mañicūdāvadāna*, being a translation and edition, and Lokānanda, a translation and synopsis, London, 1967, p. 147-188).
12. The development in the direction of enlargements is not at all a matter of course as one might assume; a year back I still was of the opinion that I.B is a sort of excerpt of II.A; but further examination forced me to revise this view.
13. In later literature Avalokiteśvara was generally identified with Matsyendranāth; cf. John K. Locke, *Rato Matsyendranath of Patan and Bungamati*, Kirtipur, 1973.
14. According to this double «link and frame» story once the monk Jayaśrī told the king Jinaśrī what the monk Upagupta in former times had reported to the famous king Aśoka, namely that previously the Buddha Śākyamuni had visited the Nepal Valley...
15. It reaches from the age of Vipaśyin when men had a lifespan of 80 000 years up to that of Kāśyapa when people lived only 20 000 years and further on to the present «historical» age.
16. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12, 1948, p. 337.
17. The use of the Hindu system of ages of the world (system of the four Yugas) already arouses suspicion.
18. Particularly of the Paśupatipurāṇa, the Nepālamāhātmya, and the Himavatkhanda.
19. Śāntideva seems to me to be the oldest form of the name though it occurs only in version I.B; I.A has Śāntikaradeva and II.A has Śāntikara instead.
20. In the text versions III.A and IV the Ācārya is identified with the very Śāntaśrī of the preceding chapter who is said to have covered the Svayambhūcaitya with a Stūpa in a former age.